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SUBJECT: CONTINUING PROBES IN PARA-POLITICAL SCANDAL
UNDERMINE CONGRESS

REF: A. BOGOTA 5530
1B. BOGOTA 7240

Classified By: Political Counselor John S. Creamer.
Reason: 1.4(b) and (d)

11. (U) The Supreme Court and the Prosecutor General's Office (Fiscalia)--with GOC support--continue to investigate politicians with alleged paramilitary ties. Former Senate President Luis Humberto Gomez Gallo was arrested on December 3, bringing the total number of congressmen in jail to eighteen. So far, 52 Congressmen, 19 mayors and 11 governors have been implicated in the scandal. Congressman Erik Morris of Sucre department was the first Congressman to be convicted of paramilitary ties, receiving a six year prison term and a \$480,000 fine. The widening scandal is eroding congressional legitimacy, complicating GOC efforts to pass key legislation.
End Summary.

And Gallo Makes Eighteen

12. (U) The Supreme Court and Fiscalia continue to investigate politicians with alleged paramilitary ties. Conservative Party Senator and former Senate President Luis Humberto Gomez Gallo was arrested on December 3 for alleged paramilitary ties and plans to assassinate a political rival.

Gallo is the eighteenth Congressman jailed for para-political connections. So far, 52 Congressmen, 19 mayors and 11 governors have been implicated; four have been sentenced. Despite criticism from legislators within his own coalition, Uribe continues to provide full support for the investigations. On December 13, former Cesar and governing coalition Senator Mauricio Pimiento - currently jailed and under investigation - called Uribe a "traitor" for not defending para-politicians.

13. (U) Congressman Erik Morris of Sucre (U party member) became the first sitting Congressman to be convicted and sentenced on December 19. Morris received six years in prison and was fined \$480,000 for criminal conspiracy with paramilitaries. Congressman Alfonso Antonio Campo Escobar of Magdalena - who resigned on June 4 - plead guilty and was convicted to five years and fined \$850,000 on November 26. To date, only one legislator--Senator Jose de Los Santos Negrete of Cordoba--has been acquitted. Nineteen former and current

mayors have been implicated, with fourteen in jail and two identified as fugitives. Twelve former and current governors have been implicated; Magdalena Governor Trino Luna Correa and Meta Governor Edilberto Castro also plead guilty and have been sentenced. Six other governors are currently in prison, and four are under investigation.

¶4. (U) Successful investigations of para-politicians have not yet translated into actions against businessmen, cattle ranchers, and security force personnel who collaborated with paramilitary groups. In November 2006, the Supreme Court tied cattle ranchers Joaquin Garcia and Miguel Nule Amin to its investigation of Sucre politicians' ties with paramilitaries, but the Fiscalia has yet to charge them. The Fiscalia announced on December 7 that it was investigating four banana companies (Proban, Uniban, Sunisa-Del Monte and Chiquita International). Chiquita was fined \$25 million in September in U.S courts for paying \$1.7 million to paramilitaries over several years, but no arrests have been made. An arrest warrant has been issued in Medellin for businessman Raul Hasbun, who allegedly had paramilitary ties.

Versiones Libres Aids Para-political Investigations

¶5. (U) Testimony by former paramilitary leaders in the Justice and Peace Law (JPL) process has been instrumental in the investigation and prosecution of para-politicians. Evidence provided by former para Jose Bedoya Rayo (aka "Moises") led to investigations of Congressmen Gonzalo Garcia-Angarita and Luis Humberto Gomez-Gallo. Paramilitary leader Ever Veloza's (aka "H.H.") testimony against Cauca Governor Juan Chaux Mosquera - who was just named Ambassador

to the Netherlands - triggered a preliminary investigation by the Fiscalia on December 20. Fiscalia officials tell us they are considering reopening criminal cases against retired General Rito Alejo del Rio and other military officers based on recent JPL testimony. The Fiscalia has a dedicated unit of eleven prosecutors investigating para-political cases, with some cases delegated to regional prosecutors.

SCANDAL IMPACTING CONGRESSIONAL LEGITIMACY

¶6. (C) Presidential advisor Jose Obdulio Gaviria told us the para-political scandal is necessary to clean up Colombian politics, but added that it is eroding congressional credibility and complicating GOC efforts to pass legislation. He noted that the GOC has already lost several congressional stalwarts, such as Senators Mario Uribe and Zulema Jattin, to the scandal. Their replacements lack the experience and political stature to defend the GOC or advance legislation. In some instances, replacement legislators received only a few thousand votes.

¶7. (C) Presidential Secretary Bernardo Moreno told us the fallout from the para-political scandal made it impossible for the GOC to gain congressional approval of a bill clarifying the legal status of almost 19,000 rank-and-file demobilized paramilitaries. Some legislators wanted to use the bill to provide relief to their colleagues caught up in the para-political investigations. Others withheld support to punish the GOC for its support for the process. He reiterated that President Uribe has no plans to revoke congress or to call for new elections to restore congressional legitimacy. Still, he said Uribe continues to consider the possibility of introducing a major political reform package when Congress resumes ordinary sessions in March.

Brownfield